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ORIGINAL

Where Have the Farm Lands Gone?

COMPLETED

"Ten years from now, Americans could be as concerned over the loss of the nation's prime and important farm lands as they are today over shortages of oil and gasoline"

"Acres are aces. A richer prize, by far, than the oil lands of the Caucasus, the iron deposits of the Urals and the gold veins of South Africa, they are the most important of man's earthly possessions."

Hugh Hammond Bennett, 1881-1960, First Administrator of the USDA Soil Conservation Service.

Cover quote by
Norman Berg, Chief
USDA Soil Conservation Service

Every day in the United States, four square miles of our nation's prime farm lands are shifted to uses other than agriculture. The thief is urban sprawl.

Today there are highways and houses, airports and shopping centers on land that once produced an abundance of grain and timber, forage, vegetables and fruits. There are motels and reservoirs, industrial parks and power plants on land where farmers once grazed their cattle and harvested cotton and flax.

American agriculture is hailed as the most productive in the world. In 1980, the value of our agricultural exports exceeded 40 billion dollars. American farm products feed our own population, they mean the difference between life and death to millions of less fortunate people whose lives are marred by chronic hunger, and they are essential to a favorable balance of trade.

But as populations expand and the need for food increases at home and abroad, one wonders: What does the continuing loss of our best *farm lands portend for the future? How long will it be before the farm land loss severely cripples farm land production?*

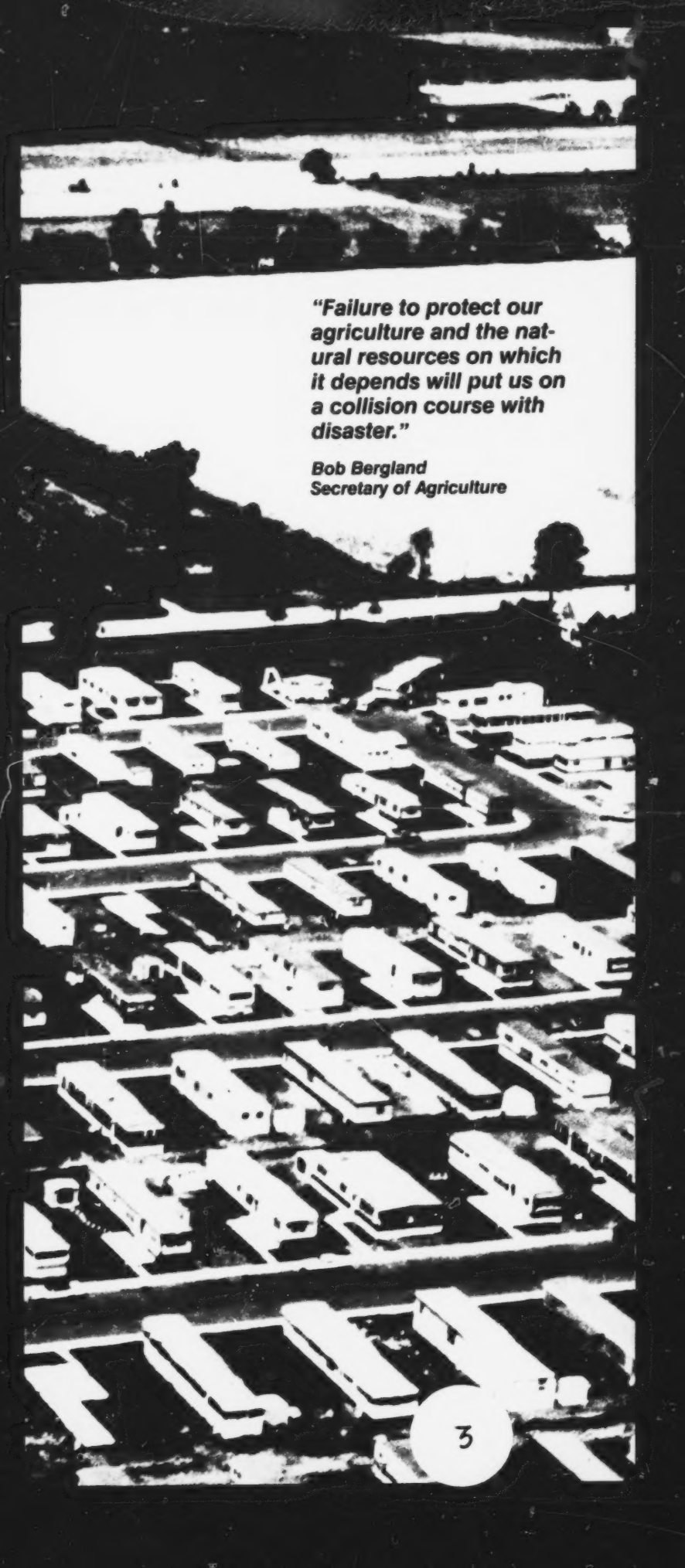
One conservationist puts the issue in sharp perspective: "Ten years from now," he says, "Americans could be as concerned over the loss of the nation's prime and important farm lands as they are today over shortages of oil and gasoline."

As prime farm land disappears, food is not our only loss. The quality of our lives is diminished. There are garish signs and glaring storefronts where leaves once caught the rain and filtered the sunlight. There is asphalt where fields and woods once beckoned and refreshed the spirit.

There is the loss, also, of farm family life, and the values that spring from living close to the land.

Clearly, then, the farm land loss demands our immediate attention.

As this century nears its end, as demands for food and competition for land accelerate, the most important question to face our nation may well be: How can we direct urban development to less productive acres, and thereby protect our irreplaceable prime farm land acres from further encroachment?



"Failure to protect our agriculture and the natural resources on which it depends will put us on a collision course with disaster."

Bob Bergland
Secretary of Agriculture

Seeking Solutions— The National Agricultural Lands Study

Cultivated farms that vanish in the wake of urban sprawl are not likely to be seen again. When pastures become parking lots, when houses crowd the land where corn once grew, the loss to agriculture is irreversible. Cloak fertile fields in steel, asphalt and cement, and there is no turning back. The farm land is gone forever.

Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland states: "The U.S. is losing one million acres of the world's best and flattest agricultural land each year to urban sprawl. In my lifetime, we've paved over the equivalent of all the cropland in Ohio. Before this century is out, we will pave over an area the size of Indiana.

"I don't know where it is going to stop. But stop it must. Continued destruction of cropland is wanton squandering of an irreplaceable resource that invites future tragedy not only nationally, but on a global scale."

Concern for this farm land is the focus of the National Agricultural Lands Study, initiated June 14, 1979 under the co-chairmanship of the United States Secretary of Agriculture and the Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality.

Twelve Federal agencies are participating in the study. State and local governments, individual landholders and public interest groups are involved. They are examining the availability of the nation's agricultural lands, the extent and causes of the lands' conversion to other uses, and the various ways it might be retained for agriculture.

Soil conservationists, soil scientists, economists, sociologists, land-use planners, forest and range conservationists, fish and wildlife specialists and others are taking part in the study.

All agricultural lands—croplands, forest and rangelands—are being scrutinized. But special emphasis is being given to prime agricultural land and how its retention or loss affects the nation and the world. (See page 14).

Public workshops organized by land grant universities and the National Agricultural Lands Study have been held nationwide.

Citizens have been asked to share their knowledge, experience and viewpoints on a broad range of questions:

- What is being done throughout America to retain farm lands for agricultural use?
- What state and local programs have been successful, and what programs have failed in slowing or preventing the conversion of agricultural lands to urban use?
- What factors have contributed to the failure or success of the various state and local efforts to protect agricultural land?
- What impact do Federal programs and policies have upon the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use?
- What are the economic, social and aesthetic gains or losses that result when farm land is shifted to non-farm use?
- If beef production is to meet our needs, what steps must be taken to retain our prime rangelands?
- What must be done to protect our prime forest lands from encroachment?
- Our wealth derives from the land—food, fiber and wood, water, minerals and energy; space for houses, business, industry and recreation. If agricultural land losses continue at the present rate, how will this affect our future ability to meet the domestic and global demands that will fall upon the overburdened acres that remain?
- Of paramount importance: How long will we be able to produce sufficient food to meet domestic and foreign needs?

The National Agricultural Lands Study

A recent report prepared for the Council on Environmental Quality by the National Conference of States Legislatures shows that 48 states and many local governments have adopted agricultural land retention programs of one form or another.

The effectiveness of these various agricultural land protection efforts will be evaluated by the National Agricultural Lands Study. The evaluation will then be made available to state and local government officials and others concerned with the agricultural land loss problem.

Michael Brewer, director of research for the study, describes the dynamics of land use, the choices citizens are forced to make, and the impact these choices have upon agricultural lands:

"Unfamiliar choices are hard," he states. "And that's what the dynamics of land use are forcing on governments and citizens in this country. A farmer's decision to sell out, decisions by county supervisors on a sewer extension, or decisions by investors to buy farm land rather than other securities increases the pressure on agricultural lands. Each choice may be sensible in its own context. But collectively they reduce the country's capacity to produce food, fiber, and wood.

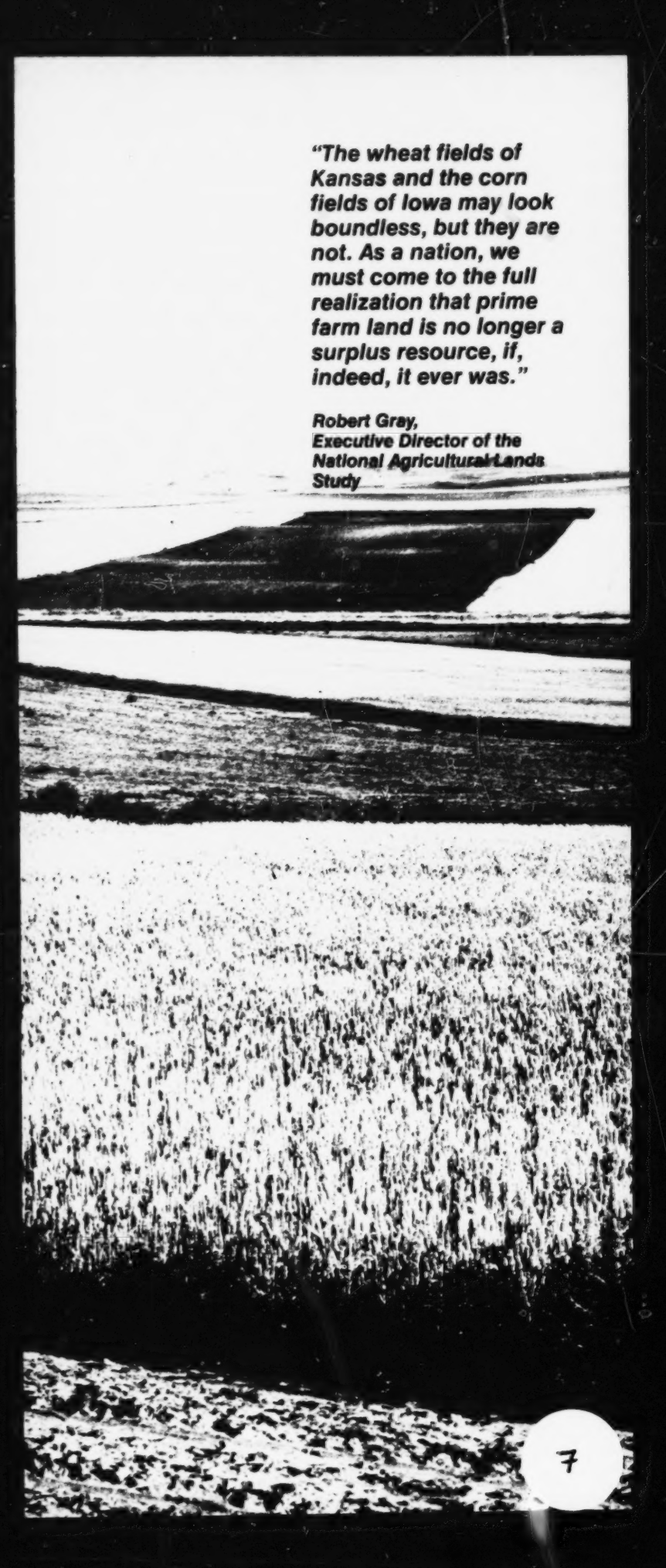
"The bind comes at a bad time—when we no longer have reserve land set aside, when global food demands are hitting new highs, and when agricultural exports have become essential to offset large trade deficits.

"What to do? A first step is to find out how extensive the problem is, where it occurs most severely, and what tools are available to local, state and Federal governments to deal with it. This is what the National Agricultural Lands Study is about."

The National Agricultural Lands Study is to be completed by January, 1981. At that time, a detailed report of citizens' viewpoints and the findings of scientists and researchers will be submitted to the president. In December 1980, the Study will publish a "Guide for State and Local Governments on Programs to Protect Farm Land." The guidebook will be available to the public free of charge.□

"The wheat fields of Kansas and the corn fields of Iowa may look boundless, but they are not. As a nation, we must come to the full realization that prime farm land is no longer a surplus resource, if, indeed, it ever was."

Robert Gray,
Executive Director of the National Agricultural Lands Study



What is Prime Farmland, and Why is it Disappearing?

Prime land is the *best* land for farming. The land is flat or gently rolling, and susceptible to little or no soil erosion. Prime land includes crop, pasture, range and forest lands. Prime acres are our most energy efficient, producing the most food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops with the least fuel, fertilizer and labor. Their soil quality, growing season and moisture supply assure continuous, high productivity without degrading the environment.

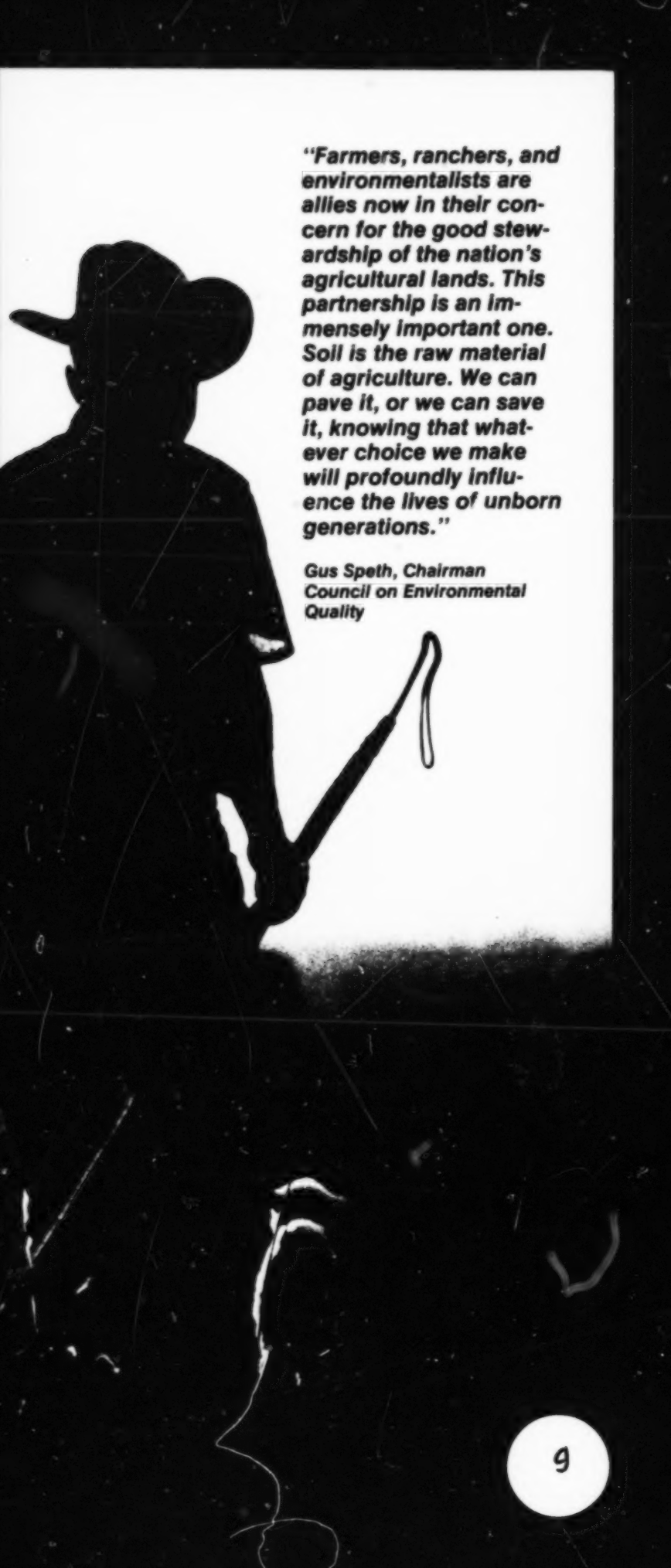
Prime, flat lands are also the least costly to build upon. When towns and cities grow, it is usually these valuable agricultural acres that are used for highways, houses, shopping malls, industrial parks and other urban development.

In the war between the bulldozer and the plow, one million acres of America's prime farm lands are urbanized each year. *A million acres equals a half-mile strip of land from New York to California—or the loss of four square miles of our best agricultural land every day.*

In addition to the prime farm land loss, we are losing another two million acres of lesser quality, nevertheless productive agricultural land to nonagricultural conversion each year. *The total annual loss of three million acres is the equivalent of 320 acres, or a half-section of farm land every hour.*

The farm lands' worth and the finality of our loss are vividly described by two agriculturists. Homer Carter, chief statistician for USDA's Crop Reporting Service in Ohio, states: "Ohio is one of the nation's top agricultural producers. But we are steadily losing the source of our agricultual wealth. Nearly one million acres of our croplands were converted to other uses between 1967 and 1977. On today's market, these acres would be producing more than $230,000,000 every year in corn, soybeans, wheat, hay, oats, fruits and vegetables."

New Jersey State Secretary of Agriculture Phillip Alampi says: "Good farm land is precious. It's what this country is built upon. And once prime land is lost, you don't go to the supermarket and buy a square foot of it." □



"Farmers, ranchers, and environmentalists are allies now in their concern for the good stewardship of the nation's agricultural lands. This partnership is an immensely important one. Soil is the raw material of agriculture. We can pave it, or we can save it, knowing that whatever choice we make will profoundly influence the lives of unborn generations."

Gus Speth, Chairman
Council on Environmental Quality

What are the Consequences of Our Farm Land Loss?

The immediate consequence of farm land conversion is lowered food production at a time when demand for food is increasing at home and abroad. There are other far-ranging losses as well.

When, parcel by parcel, prime acres vanish, scattered development—called "leapfrogging" or "buckshot urbanization"—breaks up and isolates an estimated million acres *more* of our best agricultural land every year. Profitable farming on these checkerboard acres becomes difficult, if not impossible.

The price of land in urbanizing areas soars. Unless protected by tax deferments, some farmers can't afford *not* to sell their land. As the best farm lands disappear, farmers are beginning to cultivate marginally productive land that needs more fertilizer and tractor fuel, and is vulnerable to severe damage from soil erosion.

Farming the wrong acres is costly. The farmer pays more. The consumer pays more. And the environment is seriously degraded. Erosion and sedimentation increase. Water quality is impaired. Wildlife habitat is lost. And the beauty of varied landscapes—a mixture of pastures, woods and fields—is diminished. Certain unique crops—red tart cherries, apples, apricots, avocadoes, prunes, citrus fruits, cranberries and peaches, for example, may vanish permanently. For there is usually no replacing the particular soils and micro-climates these crops require once the soils are sealed under asphalt or houses.

Agricultural land losses extract other penalties. Fresh food once readily available to local communities becomes costly to transport from far-distant places. Jobs are lost when the agricultural infrastructure—farm machinery centers, seed and fertilizer suppliers, etc.—is no longer needed. Farmers who continue to farm in the midst of urban development must travel long distances to buy seed and farm equipment. Farm labor becomes more costly and scarce when higher-paying city jobs are within easy commuting distance.

Moreover, the very work of the farmer may be viewed with annoyance or outright hostility by urban neighbors. Pre-dawn tractor work is noisy. Cattle are picturesque at a distance, but less so when loose in an urban backyard. □

...history,
each new subdivision,
highway, dam, factory,
power plant, or shop-
ping center threatens
permanently to reduce
the productive capacity
of American agricul-
ture."

Charles ...
American Land Forum

What About Potential Cropland—and the Future?

It is predicted that the impact of farm land conversion will be felt in the form of reduced food supplies and higher prices as early as the turn of the century. But by that time the situation may be beyond remedy.

Even now we know that there is very little potential cropland in reserve. We are—quite literally—at croplands' end. The "frontier" is closed.

While the nation is losing prime agricultural land daily, research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service shows that there are barely 135 million acres of potential cropland remaining in the United States, and only 22 million of these are prime acres with a high potential for conversion to cropland. Couple these facts with the present leveling off of crop yields and the likelihood that non-agricultural development of our prime lands will increase, and the outlook for a continuing high level of U.S. food production is open to question.

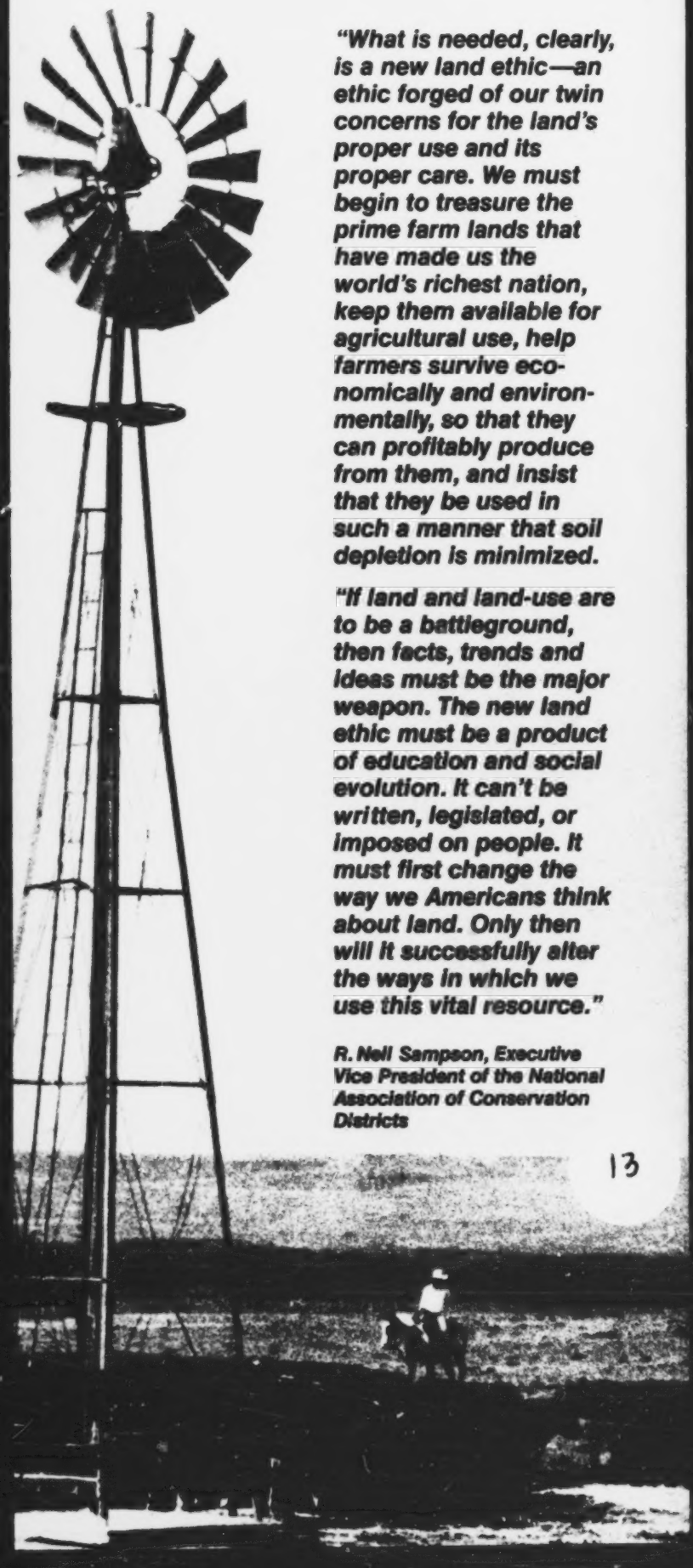
In a series of front-page articles titled "Vanishing Acres" and published July 8 through 13, 1979 in the *Des Moines Register*, Washington Correspondent George Anthan writes:

"Every time a baby is born in the United States, agriculture loses one and one-third acres of cropland.

"The connection isn't direct—it's a mathematical comparison of population and land-loss trends—but it dramatizes a problem: Our population is growing, our available farm land is shrinking, and our per-acre crop yields are leveling off."

Anthan lists the following projections for the year 2000 if farm land losses continue:

- All food produced in the United States will be consumed here.
- Consumer food prices will be pushed sharply upward. This will be a "real" price increase, not just an "inflation" increase.
- Food exports no longer will be available to help offset massive trade deficits, such as payments for foreign oil. This almost certainly would have a major negative effect on the national economy.
- The hungry people of other nations will be on their own for food supplies. □



"What is needed, clearly, is a new land ethic—an ethic forged of our twin concerns for the land's proper use and its proper care. We must begin to treasure the prime farm lands that have made us the world's richest nation, keep them available for agricultural use, help farmers survive economically and environmentally, so that they can profitably produce from them, and insist that they be used in such a manner that soil depletion is minimized.

"If land and land-use are to be a battleground, then facts, trends and ideas must be the major weapon. The new land ethic must be a product of education and social evolution. It can't be written, legislated, or imposed on people. It must first change the way we Americans think about land. Only then will it successfully alter the ways in which we use this vital resource."

R. Neil Sampson, Executive Vice President of the National Association of Conservation Districts

Will There Be Florida Oranges, Fresh Milk from St. Johnsbury— and Michigan Red Tart Cherries?

Florida—producer of more than half the world's grapefruit and one-fourth of the world's oranges—will lose virtually *all* of its unique and prime farm lands by the turn of the century if present land loss trends continue.

State-by state projections of prime farm land losses likely to occur in the near future are now available from the National Agricultural Lands Study.

NALS' statistics are based on an analysis of the USDA Soil Conservation Service National Resource Inventories which reported rates of prime farm land conversion to urban, industrial, commercial, transportation and water from 1967 to 1977.

New Hampshire and Rhode Island also are destined to lose all of their prime farm land in less than 20 years if conversion continues at the 1967 to 1977 rate. West Virginia will lose 73%, Connecticut 70%, Massachusetts 51%, Maryland and New Mexico 44%, Vermont 43%, Utah 35%, Virginia 24%, Montana and Washington 23%, Pennsylvania 21%, Hawaii and South Carolina 20%, Arizona and Colorado 19%, North Carolina 17%, New York 16%, California 15%, Georgia 14%, Delaware 13%, Michigan 11% and Kentucky 10%. Each of the remaining states will lose less than ten percent.

Florida State Commissioner of Agriculture Doyle Conner states: "Most people don't realize it, but agriculture is essential to Florida's economic well being. In 1978, cash receipts from our citrus fruits alone exceeded one billion dollars. In that same year, returns on a whole array of Florida fruits and vegetables—tomatoes, celery, sweet corn, lettuce, green peppers, snap beans, cabbage, watermelons and potatoes—came to more than $499,000,000. Cash receipts on strawberries were $16,636,000, and the lowly cucumber rang in more than $22 million. But let's not talk about money only . . .

"Let's talk about *food*. Our position is perilous. Every time a highway or retirement homes are built on Florida farm land, we increase the likelihood of our dependence on other nations for food. Already the U.S. is importing vegetables from Mexico and South America.

"Today we are experiencing discomfort and deprivation because of our dependence on foreign oil. Is the next deprivation food?"

In St. Johnsbury, Vermont, two dairy farmers—the brothers John and Joseph Gingue (pronounced Jang)—are fighting to prevent construction of an 11-mile Federal highway interchange that would destroy their two adjacent farms. There are 525 Holstein cows grazing on their land, and the brothers provide nearby New England towns with 10,000 quarts of milk a day. But if Interstate I 93, already approved by Vermont's Department of Transportation, is built, it will slash through their fields, making farming so difficult they will be forced to abandon their lifes' work and sell most of their remaining land. The brothers are proposing that the State enlarge an already existing road, a move that would leave their land intact.

"There's more to be lost here than milk," says Joseph Gingue. "Every one of my nine children were born on this farm, and my brother's eight sons and daughters were born on his farm. Our sons have college degrees in agriculture, and want to continue dairy farming. Their grandparents—my mother and father—live in their own home just across the road. We belong here. We want to stay. We love this land."

On Northern Michigan's Old Mission Peninsula overlooking Grand Traverse Bay, a rare and delicately balanced micro-climate permits the growth of astonishingly productive red tart cherry trees. Seventy-seven percent of the Nation's tart cherries are produced in this region. High elevation, well-drained sandy loam soils, adequate rainfall, the right slope, and a breeze without a freeze combine to create precisely the right conditions for optimum growth of cherry trees. The land is "unique" in that its particular combination of soils and micro-climate cannot be duplicated elsewhere.

But one by one the irreplacable cherry orchards are disappearing. Luxury homebuilders are buying the land at vastly inflated prices because of the spectacular view of Lake Michigan and Grand Traverse Bay. In the last six years, bulldozers and chain saws have destroyed half a million of Michigan's cherry trees.

Third-generation cherry orchardist Josh Wunsch is one among a growing body of farmer activists who have organized to save the orchards. "In a public referendum held in Peninsula Township last December, we rejected by a four to one vote a plan to re-zone 200 acres of orchards and woodlands for the development of residential townhouses. This public vote is encouraging, but it doesn't suggest that our battle is won," Wunsch says. "The developers are still beating on our gates."

And so one wonders: will the race for land be won by luxury houses—or by the cherry trees and red tart cherry pie?

Michigan's Washtenaw County—producer of grains, cut flowers, musk melon, sweet corn and raspberries—is 45 miles from Detroit and losing farm land to urban sprawl. "We're making very gradual headway in saving prime land," says farmer William Fishbeck. "We're promoting the use of our USDA county soil survey to direct growth away from the best farm land. But the need for public education is great. People are only beginning to understand what agricultural land losses really mean."

NALS' projections are no surprise to the severely pressured northeastern states. Frederic Winthrop, Massachusetts Commissioner of Agriculture, states: "New England is on the cutting edge, and every northeastern state is marked. If there is a national emergency—even a truckers' strike—Massachusetts has only seven days of fresh food in reserve. Therefore, we are ahead of other regions in our farmland preservation efforts."

Escalating food prices are noted by Merle Severy, Rochester, Vermont, dairy farmer and president of the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts. "We in Vermont import about 80% of our food, and prices are 15% higher because of transportation and processing costs."

Even in America's agricultural heartland—the seemingly impenetrable Corn Belt States—there is cause for concern. Allen Hidlebaugh, NALS resource inventory specialist, makes this observation: "We anticipate a total 3.2 million acre prime farm land loss in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Missouri if present trends continue to the year 2000. By the end of this century, the annual loss will equal 480 million bushels of corn—at $2.50 a bushel, the equivalent of *one billion dollars* irretrievably lost each and every year thereafter." □

"The beautiful is as
useful as the useful,
and sometimes more

Can We Forestall A Crisis?

The American Land Forum calls for action to protect our farm lands from further loss *now*.

Decisions about agricultural lands, the Forum points out, are actually being made now, at a time when the crucial importance of the resource is practically invisible to the average citizen.

"The trouble is," the Forum states, "when the problem does 'go critical' it may well be beyond remedy . . .

"There is, as yet, no persuasive assessment of the intrinsic value of our agricultural land resources to the nation as a whole, nor is there a reliable examination of the various approaches at the state and local levels which can protect this resource fairly, affordably and permanently.

"These are not difficult tasks, but they are absolutely necessary so that policy makers may come to grips with the loss of agricultural land before it becomes a thoroughgoing crisis."

Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland says: "The time has come when we must examine this question of land use. It is a tough question because it intrudes or impinges upon private rights. We are not going to recommend Federal preemption in planning. But we will give guidance on various alternative land-use techniques that state and local communities can adopt to assure the continuing use of farm lands for farming."

In *The Worldwide Loss of Cropland,* Lester Brown, president of Worldwatch Institute, states that global cropland losses now threaten to undermine the balance between food and people. Mounting pressures on the global cropland base are seen in accelerating soil erosion, the spread of deserts, the loss of cropland to nonfarm uses, higher food costs and soaring prices for farm land almost everywhere. Brown adds that despite all the evidence, most governments take their cropland for granted. Political leaders seem oblivious to these pressures, perhaps because the cropland loss occurs in the countryside, while most political leaders live in the city. As cropland becomes more scarce, he concludes, "it can be protected from competing nonfarm demands only through land-use planning." □

"This land is your land,
This land is my land
From California
To the New York island,
From the redwood forest
To the Gulf Stream waters;
This land was made for you
and me." ©

Woody Guthrie, 1912-1967
American Balladeer

Who Is Concerned?

Concern for our shriking agricultural lands is growing. In every state and at every level of govenment, land use has become a subject of impassioned debate, and alarm over farm land losses is mounting.

While losses have been enormous in Florida and the New England states—as well as in California, Hawaii, North and South Carolina, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Washington—farm land conversion persists but is not yet so dramatically noticeable in other regions.

Lyle Bauer, Kansas wheat farmer and president of the National Association of Conservation Districts, stresses the insidious nature of the problem: "A little bit of this farm land is leaving us every day. It is being chipped away silently and nobody sees it. There is plenty of food, so nobody really cares that much."

Bauer suggests one possible solution: Offer economic incentives to developers "to get them to develop on less desirable land and stay off prime farm land."

USDA has taken a clear stand on the farm land issue. "Prime lands," the Department says, "must be protected from premature or unnecessary conversion to non-agricultural use. Major consideration must be given to these lands, and to the long-range need to retain the productive capability and the environmental values of American agriculture and forestry."

A 1976 memorandum from the Council on Environmental Quality asks Federal agencies to analyze the effects of their activities on prime agricultural land and to make a special effort to protect these lands from conversion to other uses.

The National Agricultural Lands Study will define and codify local, state and national concerns.

Citizens who are concerned about the loss of America's farm lands and wish to express their concern may do so by writing the Executive Director, National Agricultural Lands Study, 722 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech."

A Sand County Almanac
—by
Aldo Leopold, Naturalist
1886-1948

Where is Your Prime Farm Land?

A huge farm land inventory is underway in the United States. Begun in 1975 by USDA's Soil Conservation Service, the inventory identifies prime, unique and other important farm lands in counties and states.

State and local community planners and land-use decision makers are using the farm land maps to identify acres that are irreplacable for food and fiber production and valuable for open space.

Maps for ten states and 582 counties already have been published. States completed are: Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, New York and South Dakota. It is expected that maps of 1,300 high priority counties—in regions undergoing rapid land-use changes or containing rich coal reserves—will be completed by 1986.

"Obviously, people must know where their best agricultural lands are before taking steps to retain that land for agriculture," says Barry Flamm, director of USDA's Office of Environmental Quality. "SCS is counting prime acres, so that local communities can make every acre count." The maps are invaluable also, Flamm adds, in assessing environmental impacts of Federal projects on prime agricultural lands.

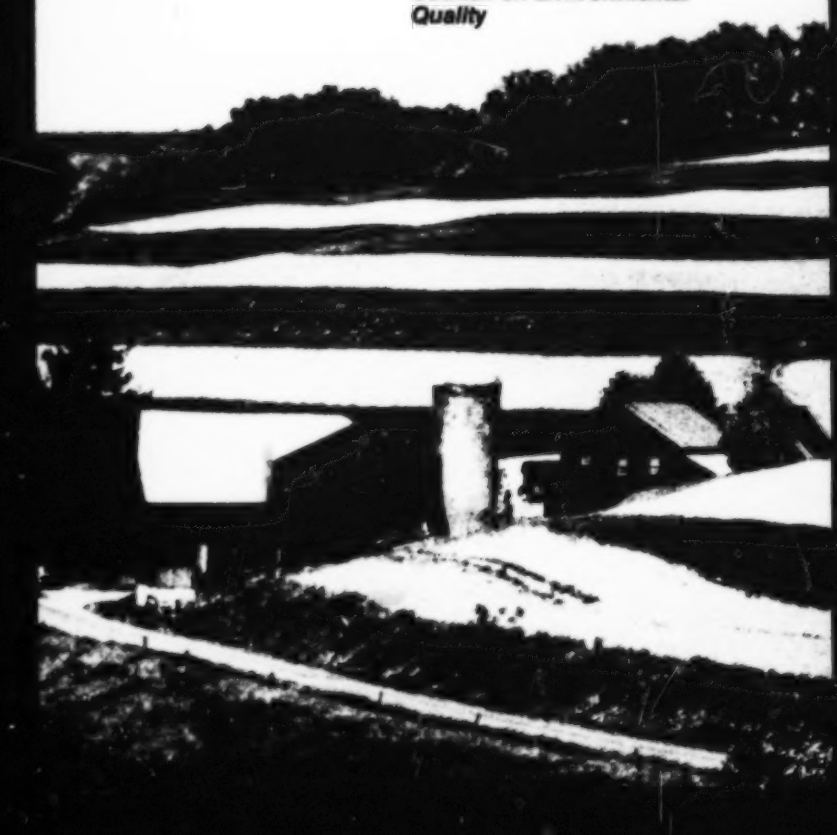
Once there were 300,000 prime farm land acres on Long Island, N.Y. Today there are fewer than 55,000, and all of these are in Suffolk County. On Sept. 8, 1976, the county became the first in the nation to vote for the purchase of development rights for strategically-located prime farm lands.

"Our agriculture is an eighty million dollar annual industry, the highest in New York State, and we are determined to protect it," explains County Executive John Klein. "To date we have spent ten million dollars on development rights for 52 farms totalling 3,300 acres. Our SCS prime farm lands map has been an indispensable aid in this work."

For more information about the SCS farm land inventory, contact your local soil conservation district or the USDA Soil Conservation Service, P.O. Box 2890, Washington D.C. 20013. □

"The pressure to convert prime farm land to other uses has been intense, since the very factors which make such land ideal for agriculture also make it desirable for development.
The Pacific, Northeast, Great Lakes and Appalachian regions have been particularly hard-hit by this problem. The continuing degradation of soils due to water and wind erosion adds to the urgency of the problem by further reducing our Nation's total crop land base. If the United States is to continue as the major supplier of food for a world whose population will increase by 2.2 billion by the year 2000, we must now take steps to protect our agricultural land."

Charles Warren,
Former Chairman
Council on Environmental Quality



An Open Letter To All Americans

Many otherwise politically aggressive Americans seem to "clam up," look the other way, or change the subject whenever it's suggested that the public's stake in private land use decisions has been inadequately protected.

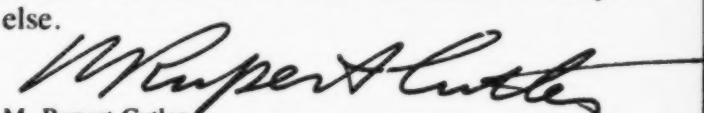
Why this blind spot among leaders whose views of our high-priority problems are otherwise unobstructed?

Perhaps tradition. By and large, in America, private property rights have been constrained very little by government.

Other American traditions are worth preserving too, however. Low-cost food, for example—including specialty crops grown on unique sites now threatened with real estate development. It's low-cost because prime land doesn't require expensive chemicals or water management. Family-operated farms and orchards near urban centers, for example. Paving these will make the community dependent upon more distant food sources, the imported food will cost more and it may be of lower quality. Farm wetlands and woodlots, for example. Their development costs us flood-crest reduction, local lumber supplies, wild birds and animals we hunt or just see along the road, and much of the oxygen that restores the quality of the air we breathe.

Hasn't the time come for a comprehensive effort by local governments, aided by state and Federal agencies, to preserve some of these traditions, in a democratic way, through the use of local land use plans approved by local people?

The USDA stands ready to help on request with prime land inventory data and planning expertise, but the public has to choose which alternative future it believes to be in the public interest. Affected local citizens can do that better than anyone else.



M. Rupert Cutler,
Former Assistant Secretary for
Natural Resources and Environment,
United States Department of Agriculture

January 1981

☆ GPO : 1981 - 336-427

". . . It is time for us to kiss the earth again, It is time to let the leaves rain from the skies, Let the rich life run to the roots again . . ."

Return—by
Robinson Jeffers—
1887-1962
American Poet

National Agricultural Lands Study

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Environmental Protection Agency

Water Resources Council

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